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ABSTRACT

The concept of autonomy can help secondary reading teachers help their students to become better readers and users of text. Research indicates that many students in content areas do not know how metacognitive strategies can be implemented so that students can become autonomous. Practical suggestions for helping readers become autonomous include modeling, risk-taking, time allotment, and purpose for reading. Reading educators need to realize that not only can autonomy be facilitated, but they can act on the effectiveness of autonomy and help their students become truly autonomous. (Contains 11 references.) (RS)

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BECOMING AUTONOMOUS:
WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS AND HOW AUTONOMY CAN BE FACILITATED IN SECONDARY READING PROGRAMS

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BECOMING AUTONOMOUS: WHAT RESEARCH SUGGESTS AND HOW AUTONOMY CAN BE FACILITATED IN SECONDARY READING PROGRAMS

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The concept of autonomy and its use in helping secondary reading teachers help their students to become better readers and users of text is addressed in this article. Research about autonomy and metacognitive strategies are discussed, secondly suggestions are given to facilitate teachers in working toward this goal of helping their students to become autonomous in their reading behavior. Modeling, risk-taking, time allotment, and purpose for reading are given for consideration. Finally, the article ends with the notion that teachers can impact their students in becoming autonomus.

Possibly one of the most frustrating concerns for content area teachers in secondary reading programs, is determining how well students have read the text, and if they understood the meaning of the text (Heller, 1983 and Flavell et al., 1985). This notion is confirmed by research by Brown (1982) which suggests that trying to find out how students learn from text and thus become autonomous is a very complex process. Wagoner (1983) suggests that readers really don't know when they have fully or adequately comprehended material. They lack ways of determining what kind of comprehension strategies are needed for the reading task.

This paper will seek to answer the question to how content area teachers can help their students to become autonomous. The focus of the paper will be a selected review of the literature concerning the role of metacognition as it relates to becoming autonomous. Then some implications will be discussed on this important area for consideration.

Kletzien and Bedner (1988) suggest that many students in secondary situations are at a lack of what to do when they finish their reading assignments. More specifically, the notion of becoming autonomous in their reading behavior. The authors state that readers lack four things that can impact learning and comprehension. These are no personal involvement in the assignments, different goals from what the teacher has planned, no understanding of the task, and little or no use of reading strategies. The reason stated by the author for this phenomena is the lack in the knowledge and use of metacognition.

Metacognition can be defined as the notion of how one can use and control the variables of the person, goal, task, and strategies in the reading process (Baker and Brown, 1984). Another way of looking at metacognition is how one applies their knowledge to monitor comprehension (Wagoner, 1983). For readers in content areas to become autonomous, metacognition must be understood and be employed in reading activities.

In a study conducted by Hare and Pulliam (1980), college students were asked by using protocol analysis to examine their awareness of their comprehension in reading. The research indicated that readers who were more aware and active were better readers. The notion of becoming independent or autonomous comes into consideration. For readers to be more autonomous, they must know what they are reading and how they can better comprehend the text. Therefore, for readers to become autonomous, they must begin to use metacogntive strategies.

Raphael et al. (1981) examined the relationship between comprehension and the monitoring or comprehension. The results indicated that the readers that used monitoring and metacognitive strategies were better comprehenders than the readers that did not use these strategies. The case for metacognition not only to become better at the reading task, but more autonomous is evident. The students that used the metacognitive strategies were more independent in the reading task. Fisher and Mandl (1982) confirm this notion in their research by suggesting that the reader's concept of self-as-learner is worth consideration for readers to become autonomous.

Heller (1986) suggests that modeling by the teacher is important for metacognitive effectiveness and autonomy to be realized in the reading process for content area teachers. Heller indicates the notion of reciprocal teaching as suggested by Palinscar and Brown (1984) as a way to establish monitoring and thus autonomy for readers. Reciprocal teaching is where using short segments of text, teachers can model summarizing, clarifying, questioning, and predicting. This then can in effect help students to learn to use these metacognitive strategies and in turn become autonomous.

What are the implications of the notion of metacognition and its role in helping readers become autonomous? First, the research is clear that many students in content areas are at a lack to how these metacognitive strategies can be implemented to become autonomous (Kletzien and Bedner, 1988 and Mize, 1980). If this be the case, then it seems that the issue at hand is to try to promote autonomy. This notion should become a top priority for all those concerned with students and reading. Reading researchers as suggested by this brief review of the literature and have indicated that megacognitive strategies can hold promise for helping students become autonomous. Thus, secondary reading teachers could be at a point of seeking practical suggestions and methods to employ these strategies. For students to become autonomous, they must not only have these strategies, but have opportunities to take risks in using these strategies. Even if failure results, students can build from these experiences to discover more ways to become autonomous. Keeping all this in

mind, I offer some practical suggestions for helping readers to become autonomous. The following suggestions are given for consideration.

1. As suggested by Heller (1986) modeling of metacognitive strategies is worth consideration. When students can see how to employ a strategy, then they should be given an opportunity to practice the strategy.
2. The teacher lets students take risks in their reading activities using metacognitive strategies. The teacher can let students use self-evaluation of how they did or did not use various strategies.
3. If autonomy is the goal, then time and sufficient amounts should be given for students to practice various metacognitive strategies.
4. Give opportunities for students to see What is being read has a purpose. Also, How, to read the text and Why one should read the text should be considered. For students to truly become autonomous, the What, How, and Why are important to consider.

For students to become autonomous, metacognitive strategies can form the core to realizing autonomy. Research suggests that students can learn to monitor their reading behavior. Thus, becoming autonomous can be an exciting outcome as teachers grapple with methods to better help their students. The main point for reading educators to realize is not only can autonomy be facilitated, but to go ahead and act on the effectiveness of autonomy. Then we can say our students are on the path to truly becoming autonomous.

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